

## [Tricked by Gypsies]

Approximately 2,700 words

48 C Revised by Author SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: TRICKED BY GYPSIES

Date of First Writing February 1, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Nick & Janie Young (Negroes)

Fictitious Name Nick & Janie Fuller

Street Address None

Place Blythewood, South Carolina

Occupation Farmers

Name of Writer Helen Shuler

Name of Reviser State Office

“Spot! Red! Shet your mouths. Ain't you got no more sense than to keep on barking?

“Please, ma'am, if you don't min', come over here where I's washin'. I just gotta get dese clothes on de line.”

The path to Janie's wash bench led across last year's cotton field.

"How many acres we plants? Lordy, chile, I ain't know for shore, 'bout fifteen, I reckon.

"My chillun send me money? Sometime dey send some, but it ain't much.

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"Please, ma'am, tell me what it is you is aimin' to git at? Well, it seems to me de hard times I's had b'longs to me. It ain't for anyone else to know.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, 'bout dem gypsies now. Dat was de awfulest thing. One day I was a settin' dere in de house just a sufferin' wid my rheumatism, and dese two women and a man drive up to de door. De man was a-drivin' de autymobile, and he ain't crack he mout' to say nothin'. De women come in de house. Dey tell me dey can help me. All I gotta do is give 'em a little sumpin'. Dey puts deir arms 'round me and honey me up. Den dey ask me for what little money I has. I ain't mind givin' 'em dat money no more than I mind givin' you dis collar I's washin'. I just hands it out to 'em. When I come to my mind, and dat money and all them other things done gone, it 'most killed me. I ain't know what dey do to me. Dey muster hypnotized me or sumpin'. Dey drive off wid two of my very best quilts what ain't never been an a bed and my brand new dress what ain't even had de scissors stuck in it. I ain't never tell Bub all day git, 'cause after it's all gone, 'tain't gonna fetch it back to tell. Besides all dat forty or fifty dollars and ny best quilts and dress, dey take two great big hams what was hangin' in de house. Each one of them hams weighed 'most forty pounds. And, when dey leave, dey says 'Now don't say nothin' to Bub 'bout dis, or you won't git no better. Den de nasty devils drive right on over to de field where Bub plowin'. Dey tell him dey can cure me if he will give 'em twenty-five dollars. Bub say dey rub a little yellow powder in deir hand and say sumpin', he ain't know what. And then dey caution him not to tell me.

"Bub say he keep watchin' me every day to see if I's better, and all 3 de time I keep thinkin' maybe I'll be better tomorrow. But, shucks, de pain ain't eased up none, and, anyway, I was sick in my mind 'cause I give away so many things. Then one day Bub say he need

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some money, and I has to tell him I ain't got no money. Gee! dat was a time. But I shore was glad dat Bub do de same thing I do; then he can't quarrel wid me.

“Yes, ma'am, dat was de awfulest thing. But de worst part was, dat me done borrowed dat money from de Gov'ment to buy fertilizer for de crop and feed for de mule. It come in on a Friday, and dese gypsies come in on Tuesday mornin'. And we gotta pay dat money back. Dat's what put us behind las' year.”

During the recital of her encounter with the gypsies, Janie's little black chinquapin eyes flashed fire, and her hands worked nervously with the clothes, as she hustled from the tub to the washpot and back to the tub again. In her bright-colored print dress, a man's old gray coat, and with a red bandanna tied around her head, Janie, a ginger-colored Negro, looked very much like one of the despised gypsies.

“How old was we when we got married? Well, let me think. I must've been 'bout seventeen, and Bub was most twenty-one. I shore wish you could've seen our marriage. It shore was sweet. Ma made me a white dress and a long white net veil. Miss Langford, she give me a pair of long white silk gloves. And she fix me a big bouquet of white flowers and tie 'em with ribbon. Dere was such a crowd, we had de marriage out in de yard. We put a table under de tree for de cakes. Ma made a cake and iced it all over wid white icing. Then some of de people present me wid cakes. All de bridesmaids fetch me a cake, too. De crowd stay all afternoon, and, when 4 me and Bub drive off, dey throw rice at us.

“Yes, ma'am, we went right to housekeeping. Bub was hired out to Mr. Wilson, and we went over dere to live. He paid Bub fifteen dollars a month and give us a ramshackle old house to live in.”

By now, Janie's mind had been diverted from the idea of telling of her hardships, and she willingly revealed the story of her life with Nick.

"We could live very well with me working all de time in de field for forty cents a day. I did anything dere was to do on a farm, 'cept plow. I sow de seed, chop cotton, hoe de crop, and put down fertilizer, and do anything else dey wants done. We work four years wid Mr. Wilson and managed to save enough money to buy us a mule and a wagon. Then Bub take a notion he want to rent some land; so we move to Mr. Wall's place. And dat year, we work fifteen acres. He charge us one five-hundred pound bale of cotton. But dat was de first year de weevil was so bad, and we didn't make no cotton to speak of.

"We didn't have near enough to pay de rent. But Bub bought wood off different places, wherever he could find it, and hauled it to Columbia. He went three days out of every week. He would leave home between one and two o'clock in de morning. On Saddays, I went with him and worked for a white lady in Columbia. She just give me things. I didn't want her to pay me no money, 'cause what she give me was worth more then what de money would buy. When de chillun got big enough, we'd take them with us. Sometimes in de winter it would be so cold we'd have to stop 'side de road and buil' a fire. After we sold de wood, Bub would give de chillun what he aim for 'em to have. You know, you have to 'lownce 'em out or dey want everything dey see.

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We just stayed dat one year on Mr. Wall's place. Bub decided he could do better to sharecrop. De next three years, we worked on de Lathrop place. Bub had his mule and wagon, and we done de work. Mr. Lathrope furnished de seed and fertilizer. Dese years we did very well. We made plenty of corn, peas, and potatoes, and raised some hogs and a cow. But we had very little money. Yes, ma'am, a very little money."

Nick, Janie's husband, walked leisurely down the path to the spring.

"This shore is nice cool water, Janie. You ain't got dem clothes out yet? Here 'tis way past noon, and I hungry as I can be. I been cuttin' bushes 'round de field all mornin', and now I's ready for de rations.

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"Yes, ma'am, it shore make a nice place for Janie to wash. Dem sweet gum trees keep it cool in de summertime, and de wind can't hit you in de winter, 'cause it down in a hollow. I box up de spring dat way to keep de trash out. Dat spring ain't never fail us yet, no matter how dry de weather.

"Shore, I been livin' on a farm all my life. Ma and Pa live over dere on de Rick's place. I always had to work hard; but I liked de country and always wanted to own my farm.

"Me and Janie been livin' first one place and den another. Sometime we rent de land and sometime we sharecrop. But it ain't matter where we livin', I hauls dat wood to Columbia."

"Yes, ma'am," Janie repeated, "haulin' wood is shore in it."

"De past year or two I ain't been able to haul no wood. You see, Missy, dat mule old now, and he most done. I just hope he'll make another crop."

"While we was livin' dare on de Langford place, Ma was trying to pay for dis farm. She had a hard time tryin' to keep up de taxes and gittin' 6 money to make de crops, and she had to-borrow some money from us. She give us a mortgage on de place. Pa had been dead several years, and Ma had got married again. But her husband didn't take no interest in de farm, and he wouldn't help her. Then Ma decided to move to Columbia, and she turned de farm over to us. We had to pay lots of back taxes and pay de other chillun's interest. Sometimes I think we'll never git through payin'."

"Missy, dey ain't nothin' like paid yet," Nick rejoined. "And dis new house, you calls it, ain't new atall.

"You know, I useta b'long over here to de Flat Branch Church. Janie, she stick to Round Top. She wouldn't change her church. And she shore showed wisdom, 'cause now dere ain't no Flat Branch. Our parson useta always come from Columbia on preachin' Sunday. Nearly every time he's come to our house for dinner."

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"You might call it dinner, Bub, but many a time 'twan't nothin' but bread and meat."

"Well, it was sumpin' to eat, and he was mighty glad to git it. Den de members begin to move away. Some of 'em jined Round Top, and de few what was left didn't come to preachin'. Sometime dere wouldn't be a soul at de church but me and de preacher. Den he quit comin'. De church was dere not bein' used. So I bargained wid de few members dat was left, and I bought de buildin' for sixty dollars. I borrowed de money, and now I done pay it all back.

"How I pay 'em back? Whenever I could git a day, I worked at de sawmill. And den I helped one and another wid de farm work, and I keep haulin' wood to Columbia. Den Janie, she work and help, too."

"I reckon I did help. I sold everything I could rake and scrape.

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Payin' debts and raisin' eleven head of chillun ain't no joke."

"Janie is good help in de white folks kitchen, and we is always helping wid de butcherin'. We makes it a practice to be honest and do our work right so we can go back again. I ain't want no one to steal even one pea from me, and I ain't want nothin' dat ain't mine. I try my bes' to make my chillun do de same. When I find one take sumpin', I use de switch where it do de mos' good.

"No, ma'am, dese youngest ones what's at home now go to school, but de oldest ones didn't take to books. Dey'd ruther work on de farm, and we shore needed 'em. Dere's three of 'em up in High Point, North Carolina. Minnie is a nurse and maid for some white folks. Sometimes dey sends me a little money. Little Nick is married, and he works at de sawmill. Arthur works over yonder in de dog hospital and gits five dollars a week. He helps me a little, but can't send much. One girl is married, and de other five are still with us. Me and Nick didn't have no chance at schoolin', and we wanted to send our chillun. Dey

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can all read and write, and dat's more than we can do. We shore had a hard time gettin' all dese chillun raised. Sometimes dere wasn't too much to eat; and we was glad when de summertime come, 'cause den we didn't need much clothes. De good Lord keep us well, and dat shore helps. Little Janie is de onliest one what had any trouble to 'mount to anything. Her tonsils was bad, and we had to take her to de clinic. Dey claim dey out 'em out. But I ain't know, 'cause her throat bleeds some yet."

While Janie finished up her washing, Nick, sitting on an upturned water bucket and leaning back against a tree, told about the farm and his crops.

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"We got one hundred acres in one trac', and forty acres in another. Lordy! No, ma'am, dere ain't but forty or fifty acres cleared. De res' is woods, mostly oaks and sweet gums and poplar, with a few pines. My crops dis las' pas' year was pretty near all failures, I planted six or seven acres of cotton. But dere was so much rain, and de weevil eat 'em up so bad, I ain't git but one bale. I plant my corn in de bottom lan', 'cause it de richest, and I ain't have no fertilizer. But de rains come and drown 'em out. Den I had peas in de corn, and, when we pick 'em, dere ain't but six or seven bushels. Since me and Janie give all dat money to dem gypsies, I ain't had none to buy fertilizer. And dis flat, sandy lan' shore takes a plenty. If I could get steady work somewhere's 'til time to start de crop, or if I could git on dat PWA, it'd shore help. Taxes is just pilin' up. Dere must be morn'n a hundred dollars back taxes, and I just don't see where dey comin' from. And I don't know if I can borrow from de Gov'ment again dis year or no.

"No, ma'am, I ain't never had much time for nothin' but work. Sometime I go coon huntin' wid de white folks. I's de guide, 'cause I know all dese woods 'round here. But I 'member one night I gits all turned 'round, and we gits lost. It's daylight before we gits home."

"Did the gypsies help the rheumatism, Janie?"

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“Help? No, ma'am, dat dey ain't. Right now I got a piece of red flannin' pinned across my shoulders. When I wake up dis mornin', I couldn't hardly git my head off de pillow. Dey shore never done me no good.”

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